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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to examine the following question: What is the relationship between parental interest and control over their adolescent children, and juvenile delinquency? Two hypotheses were tested: (1) fewer adolescents who report greater parental control will report engaging in delinquent behavior than adolescents who report less parental control; and (2) fewer adolescents who report greater parental interest will report engaging in delinquent behavior than adolescents who report less parental control. Approximately 7,000 high school students responded to a four-page questionnaire containing self-report questions on juvenile delinquency, parental control, and parental interest. Results indicated little, if any, support for the two hypotheses. However, when using individual items which were combined to create the overall rating scales, almost every relationship was significant. The author discusses the reasons for these results. (Author/PC)

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PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

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PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Many laymen feel that the basis of juvenile delinquency lies in the adequacy (or inadequacy) of the relationship adolescents establish with their parents. This feeling is reflected in a variety of different statements ranging from "Why don't they keep their kids at home," to "I wish they took more interest in Her." This position is reflected in condemnations or accusations toward parents who, in the minds of those who advocate this position, do not seem to spend enough time with their children, to show an appropriate level of interest and exercise sufficient control over them -- the working mother, the single parent, the career-oriented father, indifferent parents, and so forth.

Equally apparent is the interest researchers from a variety of different disciplines have in the same kind of position. There is some evidence that suggests that parents who lack control over and interest in their adolescents have adolescents with higher rates of delinquency than adolescents with parents who do have sufficient control and interest in them (cf. Aronfreed, 1969, Dentler and Monroe, 1961, Glueck and Glueck, 1950, Duncan, 1971, and Mueller, 1971). Admittedly, some of the evidence is only indirectly related to such an assertion.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the following question: What is the relationship between parental interest and control over their adolescent children and juvenile delinquency? Specifically, we will test the following two hypotheses:

1. Fewer adolescents who report greater parental control will report engaging in delinquent behavior than adolescents who report less parental control.

2. Fewer adolescents who report greater parental interest will report engaging in delinquent behavior than adolescents who report less parental control.

METHODOLOGY

The sample. -- Responses from 3,435 male adolescents and 3,638 female adolescents (N = 7,073) from forty-six different high schools are reported in this paper. The sample approximates a cluster sample but, strictly speaking, is an accidental sample. An attempt was made to have participating high schools in all major regions of the country. However, the sample is slightly biased in favor of the Intermountain West; The Northeastern part of the country is under-represented. Students from the tenth grade through the twelfth grade are included in the sample.

Within each of the individual high schools, the sample was either the total population of the high school or a cluster sample selected from required classes such as mathematics, English, and health. Most of the high school administrators who aided in the study seemed to be interested in securing a "good" sample.

In high schools within the Intermountain West, the research instrument (a four-page questionnaire) was administered to groups of students by the writer or his assistants. In other areas of the country, high school teachers as well as sociologists known to the writer administered the questionnaire.

Operationalizing delinquency. -- Anyone familiar with the literature dealing with juvenile delinquency is probably sensitive to the many problems associated with operationalizing the concept. Some writers have stressed the great amount of undected delinquency. According to Empey (1969) the degree of apprehension is extremely low, somewhere between three and five percent of all self-

reported offenses. Not infrequently, the self-reported offenses ignore the seriousness of the offenses -- a problem other researchers have attempted to rectify. Gould (1969) found that the traditional relationship between race and delinquency does not hold when self-reported delinquency measures are used. Officially-reported and self-reported delinquency are related only among Caucasians.

In this paper, the adolescents were asked the following question: "Without being too specific, we would like to know something about your contacts with law enforcement agencies. Of the following, indicate the one that best applies in your entire life. We are not concerned with traffic." The respondents could then answer in terms of the following fixed-alternative responses:

1. I have been stopped by the police, but not arrested.
2. I have been arrested, but not convicted of law violations.
3. I have been arrested and convicted of law violations.
4. I have violated the law, but I have never been caught.
5. I have never violated the law or been stopped by officers.

In addition, any of the adolescents who checked one of the first three responses were also asked: "Did you violate the law?"

All of the adolescents who gave the fifth response are categorized as non-delinquents. The respondents who indicated they have had contact with law enforcement agencies but claimed they did not violate the law are classified as "juveniles with contact." Finally, all of the others are classified as "juvenile delinquents."

Control and interest scales. -- Control refers to the attempts of parents to modify or direct their children in accordance with pre-determined standards of conduct. As control is operationally defined here, parents who exercise control over many of their children's activities, even though not always

strong control, are considered to exercise greater control over their children than parents who might attempt to rigidly control only one or two of their children's activities.

Interest refers to the degree of concern or regard parents have for their children. Here, too, the degree of interest parents have in their children is proportional to the number of behavioral areas in which they are interested. Parents who have extreme interest in only one area of their children's lives are considered to have less interest in them than parents who have a moderate amount of interest in many areas of their children's lives.

Obviously the two concepts are related. Parents who attempt to control most of their children's activities are interested in their behavior. Permissive parents would not exercise much control over their children's activities even though they could have a high degree of interest in them.

The control Scales consisted of six questions.[1] The adolescents were asked to indicate how strongly their father and mother would disapprove: a) if they did not tell him or her what they did on their dates or other activities at night, b) if they failed to show him or her proper respect, c) if they repeatedly failed to get

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[1]Because in pretests it was found that some adolescents had a difficult time thinking in terms of strong and weak parental regulations, it was necessary to alter the form of the questions. It was assumed that it would be easier (and more accurate) for the adolescents to report the degree of reaction their parents would manifest if they were disobeyed, rather than evaluating abstractly the relative strengths of different regulations.

In a strict sense, this scale does not measure parental control. At best, it measures the perception adolescents have of the degree of parental disapproval or objection (negative sanctions) to assumed norm violation. The control scale does not mean that the control attempts by the parents are successful. High control parents are perceived as attempting to control more behavioral areas in the lives of adolescents than low control parents.

their homework done, d) if they started selecting clothes they liked but he or she did not, e) if they started coming home late from school without an acceptable reason, and f) if they started to spend their money for things he or she did not approve.[2]

The Interest Scales consisted of six questions, also. The adolescents were asked to indicate the degree of interest their father and mother have in: a) the clubs or organizations to which they belong, b) their daydreams, c) their judgement about family problems, d) what they do at school, e) their problems, and f) how they enjoyed their dates or other activities at night.[3]

FINDINGS

Using the four scales, and controlling for the sex role of the adolescents, we found very little, if any, support for the two hypotheses. See Tables 1 and 2.[4] While we found statistically significant relationships in two cases (Paternal control over female adolescents and paternal interest in female adolescents), the relationships are so low, we would conclude, based on these data, that parental control and interest has very little to do with our understanding of juvenile delinquency.

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[2]Both the Paternal and Maternal Control Scales are Guttman-type scales. The Paternal Control Scale has a coefficient of reproducibility of .90; the Maternal Control Scale has a coefficient of reproducibility of .91.

While it is recognized that fathers may attempt to control different activities than mothers, the same questions were included in the scales in order to make comparisons between the two scales.

[3]The Paternal and Maternal Interest Scales are also Guttman-Type scales. The Paternal Interest Scale has a coefficient of reproducibility of .91; the Maternal Interest Scale has a coefficient of reproducibility of .87 (a quasi-scale).

[4]Among the males 243 said they had no father; 283 of the females gave the same response. Among the males 74 said they had no mother; 79 of the females said they had no mother. These help explain the manner in which the totals fluctuate in these two tables.

We then decided to examine each of the areas of control and interest separately. The statistical measures appear in Table 3. Here we found a different story. All of the sixty-four relationships were statistically significant except for one of them. The one that was not significant was the paternal interest in the adolescent females' plans. Incidently, while we had only six areas of parent-child interaction in each of the four scales, we included in this analysis two other areas (for both control as well as interest) that were originally discarded because they would not "scale." Here we find that the adolescents whom we identified as delinquents very consistently indicated that their parents have less interest in them and control over them in the areas we identified. We should, perhaps, stress the obvious; this is not an all or nothing kind of relationship. Consistently slightly more of the delinquents indicate less interest and less control from their parents.

Especially interesting in this analysis is the fact that in most of the cases, more of the male adolescents had a tendency to report they either didn't know how their parents would react or they didn't know how interested the parents were in this particular area of the adolescents life.

We found some other things about the adolescents in this research. We found that more of the male delinquents (49.3%) said they worried about family problems than the male delinquents (30.4%) who gave the same response. However, this is reversed in the female delinquents. Only 24.8 percent of the females said they worried about family problems compared with 64.4 percent of the female nondelinquents.

We also found that more of the male and female delinquents reported that they have more close same-sex friends than the nondelinquents. We found that more

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-REPORTED DELINQUENCY AND PATERNAL AND MATERNAL CONTROL ACCORDING TO SEX ROLE OF THE ADOLESCENT

TABLE 1

Self-Reported Delinquency	Degree of Parental Control 0 Low	1	2	3	4	5	6 High	TOTAL	TOTAL
PATERNAL CONTROL:	Male Adolescents[a]								
Delinquents	5.4%	17.3%	17.5%	19.4%	18.6%	16.0%	5.8%	100.0%	1678
With Contact	4.5	15.1	16.9	21.7	20.1	17.6	4.1	100.0	443
Non Delinquents	6.1	15.1	17.9	20.4	19.2	16.8	4.6	100.1	1089
TOTAL N	177	521	564	643	610	530	165		3210
PATERNAL CONTROL:	Female Adolescents[b]								
Delinquents	5.0	15.5	18.4	21.6	17.6	17.6	4.3	100.0	973
With Contact	2.3	17.1	15.8	15.3	23.4	20.7	5.4	100.0	222
Non Delinquents	4.9	16.6	16.7	19.2	19.9	16.7	6.0	100.0	2241
TOTAL N	163	560	588	675	670	692	188		3436
MATERNAL CONTROL:	Male Adolescents[c]								
Delinquents	2.3	17.5	19.0	17.9	19.7	16.3	7.3	100.0	1770
With Contact	2.0	17.4	16.3	18.9	23.9	16.1	5.4	100.0	460
Non Delinquents	2.0	15.1	19.1	21.6	18.9	16.5	6.7	99.9	1142
TOTAL N	73	563	629	650	675	551	231		3372
MATERNAL CONTROL:	Female Adolescents[d]								
Delinquents	1.2	17.2	18.7	21.7	18.6	17.8	4.9	100.1	1023
With Contact	1.7	17.0	20.0	14.5	21.7	16.6	8.5	100.0	235
Non Delinquents	2.2	16.8	17.6	19.9	20.2	17.4	.59	100.0	2340
TOTAL N	68	610	649	722	714	628	207		3598

[a] P = 0.70, Not Sig., gamma = 0.007
[b] P = 0.04, Sig., gamma = 0.01
[c] P = 0.19, Not Sig., gamma = 0.01
[d] P = 0.17, Not Sig., gamma = 0.005

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-REPORTED DELINQUENCY AND PATERNAL AND MATERNAL CONTROL ACCORDING TO SEX ROLE OF THE ADOLESCENT

TABLE 2

Self-Reported Delinquency	Degree of Parental Control							TOTAL	TOTAL
	0 Low	1	2	3	4	5	6 High		
PATERNAL INTEREST: Male Adolescents[a]									
Delinquents	8.4%	16.2%	20.1%	18.9%	18.1%	13.1%	5.2%	100.0%	1672
With Contact	7.5	20.0	20.3	19.8	16.2	13.2	3.0	100.0	439
Non Delinquents	7.6	18.0	21.5	19.2	16.0	12.7	5.1	100.1	1086
TOTAL N	256	555	658	611	547	415	155		3197
PATERNAL INTEREST: Female Adolescents[b]									
Delinquents	7.0	18.7	20.0	21.7	17.5	11.9	3.2	100.0	968
With Contact	3.6	20.0	15.0	23.6	20.9	11.8	5.0	99.9	220
Non Delinquents	8.0	17.6	20.3	19.5	15.6	13.9	5.0	99.9	2239
TOTAL N	255	620	681	698	565	452	156		3427
MATERNAL INTEREST: Male Adolescents[c]									
Delinquents	3.2	16.5	20.7	19.7	18.0	14.3	7.4	99.8	1764
With Contact	3.5	18.4	20.6	20.8	15.5	16.8	4.4	100.0	457
Non Delinquents	2.6	17.2	22.0	20.1	17.1	14.3	6.7	100.0	1137
TOTAL N	102	571	710	672	583	493	227		3358
MATERNAL INTEREST: Female Adolescents[d]									
Delinquents	3.5	16.3	22.0	23.5	17.1	12.4	5.2	100.0	1024
With Contact	1.3	19.4	17.7	22.0	19.8	12.9	6.9	100.0	232
Non Delinquents	3.6	17.5	19.1	20.7	16.8	15.0	7.3	100.0	2330
TOTAL N	124	620	710	775	612	506	239		3586

[a] P = 0.56, Not Sig., gamma = 0.02
[b] P = 0.04, Sig., gamma = 0.01
[c] P = 0.52, Not Sig., gamma = 0.02
[d] P = 0.06, Not Sig., gamma = 0.04

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-REPORTED DELINQUENCY AND AREAS OF PATERNAL AND MATERNAL INTEREST AND CONTROL ACCORDING TO SEX ROLE OF ADOLESCENT

TABLE 3

AREAS	PATERNAL			MATERNAL		
	Male Adolescents		Female	Male Adolescents		Female
CONTROL						
1. Dating Activities	-0.09*		-0.10	-0.05		-0.10
2. Respect for Parents	-0.08*		-0.08	-0.08*		-0.12
3. Failure to do their work	-0.10*		-0.08	-0.08*		-0.11
4. Seeing Movies	-0.11*		-0.13	-0.10*		-0.13
5. Dating Partners	-0.08*		-0.07	-0.06*		-0.09
6. Selecting Clothing	-0.06*		-0.07	-0.06		-0.07*
7. Late from School	-0.10*		-0.10	-0.09*		-0.11
8. Spending Money	-0.07*		-0.07	-0.06*		-0.07*
INTEREST						
1. Clubs	-0.08*		-0.12	-0.07*		-0.11
2. Daydreams	-0.03*		-0.09	-0.03*		-0.12
3. Health	-0.07*		-0.09	-0.09*		-0.11
4. Judgment	-0.08*		-0.10	-0.07*		-0.11
5. Plans	-0.04*		-0.05	-0.02*		-0.06
			Not Sig.			
6. School	-0.06*		-0.08	-0.06*		-0.08
7. Problems	-0.08*		-0.13	-0.07*		-0.11
8. Dates	-0.09*		-0.11	-0.06*		-0.10

All of the above are gammas and all are significant at the 0.001 level or less. The one relationship which is not significant is noted.

*In these cells a higher percentage of those identified as delinquents gave a don't know response than those with contact and the non-delinquents.

of the male delinquents (than the male nondelinquents) date more frequently, as well as go steady more frequently. Those who do not go steady date more people than the nondelinquents. The same is true for the female delinquents.

We found a tendency for both the male and female delinquents to see themselves as being less happy than the non delinquents. Also fewer of them report that they can plan for the future than the nondelinquents. More of the delinquents reported that they feign illness more than the nondelinquents.

In the case of the male delinquents, there is a tendency for more of them to come from larger families; the tendency is the same for the delinquents who are females, but the relationship is not as great. This is probably related to social class rather than family size per se. More of the delinquents in this study are from the lower class than the other classes. In terms of birth order, there is a tendency for the first born not to be delinquent in contrast with the last born. This is especially so for the male delinquents. Among the last born of the male adolescents 50.9 percent of them were categorized as delinquent; only 28.9 percent of them were identified as non-delinquent. Among the last born females 12.6 percent were classified as delinquent in contrast with 11.9 percent of the other last born female adolescents. We also found a tendency for only-children, when they are male, to be delinquents. They are less likely to be delinquents when they are female. Of course, we found that the delinquency rate among broken families to be higher than that of intact families.

Finally, we found some interesting differences between delinquents and non-delinquents in terms of their experiences at school. The male delinquents tend to get lower grades at school than the male non-delinquents. The same is not true of

the female delinquents. However, both the male and the female delinquents report they are less frequently involved in extracurricular activities than the nondelinquents. And, as would be expected, more of the delinquents of both sexes report they dislike school.

DISCUSSION

Utilizing four scales which we assumed measured parental interest and control, we did not find the relationships to be statistically significant as we originally hypothesized. However, when using the individual items which were combined to make the scales, almost every relationship was significant as we originally hypothesized.

Several things may have happened. First, one possibility is that our scales (or the questions) are invalid. Either of them may not measure what we intended that they measure. Second, another possibility is that the manner of collapsing the response categories to make the scales resulted in the scales measuring something different from the questions themselves. In the construction of the scales the original five fixed-alternative responses were dichotomized to form the Guttman-type scales. Third, inclusion of respondents who did not answer all of the questions (and, consequently discarded from the analysis with the scales) means that the two analyses are not concerned with identical samples. Fourth, the don't know responses were not used in the scale construction. Here again, the two analyses are not concerned with identical samples. Fifth, even the exclusion of the two areas in all the scales could have had some impact. As to which explanation or explanations are most useful in understanding the differences in the two analyses, only additional research can determine.

We should not overlook the don't know responses of the male delinquent. It could be that the male delinquent simply lives in a family situation in which the norms are not clearly defined for him -- especially in regard to his relationship with his parents. While a majority of the male delinquents did not consistently record don't know responses for all of the areas of parent-child interaction we investigated, a significant number of them did indicate they did not know how to predict the responses of their parents if they should become involved in disapproved activities or whether or not the parents were interested in them. Possibly male delinquents are as confused about their role as Maslow and Diaz-Guerrero (1960) found the fathers of delinquents to be confused about their role as father. Certainly, future research should focus on the existence of adolescent recognized norms concerning the adolescents relationship with his parents. Also, because the evidence concerning the original hypotheses is so unclear, additional research seems warrented on the relationship between parental control and interest and juvenile delinquency.

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